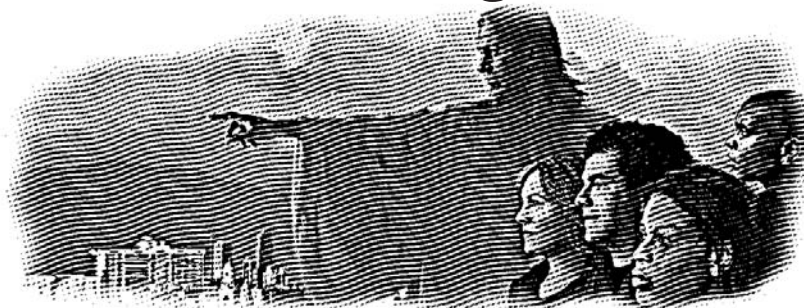


Explaining What Evangelism¹ and Witnessing Mean



SABBATH—MARCH 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 4:33; Acts 13:48; 1 John 1:3; Acts 13:1–49; Acts 22:2–21; 1 Peter 3:15.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘So you must go and make disciples [followers] of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And you can be sure that I am always with you, to the very end’ ” (Matthew 28:19, 20, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: If we are to take part in spreading the gospel, we must understand what “evangelism” and “witnessing” mean.

A WORKER OFTEN IS GIVEN A “JOB DESCRIPTION.” It is a list of duties he or she is expected to do.

The Bible also speaks about a “job description” for God’s people. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NlrV), the apostle Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to “always give yourselves completely to the work of the Lord.” Paul does not say what kind of work he is talking about. But the wording in 1 Corinthians 16:10 speaks about the work of the Lord done by Timothy and Paul in evangelism and witnessing about Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation. So, Paul’s encouragement in chapter 15 certainly includes the work of spreading the gospel.

This week we will study what evangelism and witnessing actually are. We will try to learn what our “job description” is, according to the Bible.

1. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

SUNDAY—APRIL 1**Evangelism Is . . . ? (Acts 4:33)**

We get a clear picture of what evangelism is by studying the first evangelists.² Their world and our world are very different. But both worlds are sinful, fallen, and broken. So, they both were, or are, in need of hope and salvation. More than one hundred years ago, German philosopher (thinker) Arthur Schopenhauer explained the human condition this way: “Everyone who has ever lived often has wished that he did not have to live through the following day.”—Adapted from *The World as Will and Idea* (London: Everyman, Orion Publishing. Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2001), page 204. Little has changed since Paul’s time, Schopenhauer’s time, or in our time. So, the main points of the evangelistic³ preaching in Paul’s time also should be ours today.

Read Acts 4:33; Acts 5:42; Acts 2:36–39; Acts 7:56; and Acts 13:48. What are some of the disciples’ themes (ideas) that should be included in today’s evangelistic preaching?

To be an evangelist, a person must have personal understanding and experience of “the everlasting gospel.” It is this gospel that brings belief, confession, conversion (change in one’s life), baptism, discipleship,⁴ and the promise of eternal life.

The Jewish leaders saw how bold the apostles (teachers and elders) were.

This boldness made them see that the apostles had been with Jesus (read Acts 4:13). These leaders thought this way because they were with a group of men who seemed to talk about nothing else but Jesus’ life and teachings. Evangelism and witnessing are connected with speaking about the life and teachings of Jesus. Those teachings and beliefs make the individual believer’s life different when Jesus is accepted as Lord and Savior.

It is important to view evangelism and witnessing as a continuing process rather than as a single program or event. An important part of the evangelistic work is a strong beginning and growth of a believer. The word *steadfastly* in Acts 2:42 shows a strong dedication by the new believers to spiritual growth. Clearly, the early church saw evangelism as much more than just the preaching of God’s message. Their evangelistic method was not complete until people became disciples (followers) and then had become an important part of the local group of believers.

Of all the gospel promises, which one offers you the most hope? How can you learn to hold to that promise and make it your own, no matter how difficult your life situations are?

MONDAY—APRIL 2**WITNESSING IS . . . ?
(Mark 5:18–20)**

A witness is one who gives a

2. evangelists—preachers who travel from place to place, preaching the gospel to many people.

3. evangelistic—having to do with spreading the good news about Jesus to many people.

4. discipleship—becoming a follower of Jesus and bringing others to Jesus.

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testimony.⁵ A witness claims something to be true because he or she knows it to be so from personal experience. A Christian's personal testimony about the work of God in his or her life can be very powerful. For example, Jesus healed a demon-possessed man (read Mark 5:1–19). When the healed man wanted to follow Jesus, Jesus told him, “ ‘Go home to your family. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you. Tell them how kind he has been to you’ ” (Mark 5:19, NIV).

Without question, the short time that Jesus spent with this man was not enough to teach him how to teach or preach. Nevertheless, Jesus told him to witness about what he knew. That is why Jesus said to him, “ ‘Go and tell.’ ”

Read Mark 5:18–20; Acts 22:15, 16; and 1 John 1:3. What common and important point is being made by all these verses?



Jesus has given us the responsibility to share with others how He has changed our lives.

God has given us the responsibility of sharing how He has changed our lives just as He did to the demon-possessed man at Gadara and to His other followers.

Witnessing is sharing with others one's personal experience with God and encouraging others to accept Christ. Witnessing is not necessarily as organized as radio, television, or crusade evangelism. Being a witness can come up quickly, because the opportunity to share Jesus can happen anywhere, at any time, and with anyone. So, we must be ever ready for opportunities to share our knowledge and experience.

As to the relationship between witnessing and evangelism, we can say that each of them requires a different plan for reaching the goal of winning souls for Christ. Witnessing can happen any time and can last a short time. But evangelism requires more time and more careful planning. Sometimes planned evangelism can be done better when personal witnessing is involved. And sometimes witnessing can lead people into a more planned program. But both are important parts of the whole plan. When we share what Jesus has done for us, those who are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit will want to know more. It is also a lot easier for people to argue against your doctrine (Bible teachings), your theology (teachings about God), or your beliefs. But it is not so easy to argue against your personal testimony.

5. testimony—a person's story of how his or her life is changed by Christ.

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When was the last time you had a chance to witness to someone about what Christ has done for you? What did you say? How did he or she answer? How has Christ changed your life? What is there in your life that would make someone want to learn more about Jesus?



Witnessing can be done at any time and anywhere.

TUESDAY—APRIL 3

THE BIBLE'S PROOF (Acts 13:1–49)

The early believers had problems to overcome as they dedicated themselves to (wanted to serve by) spreading the good news about Jesus. One of these problems would have been that most believers were untrained in the religious schools of the day. So, they probably would not have been accepted by the established church.

But no matter what the problems were, the apostles and other believers felt strongly called by God to continue in evangelism and witness-

ing. The blessings of forgiveness and assurance⁶ made them want to share. Witnessing was a natural result of conversion (a changed life).

Read Acts 13:1–49. What work did the Holy Spirit call Barnabas and Saul to do?

The Word of God preached everywhere included the verses about the Messiah (Chosen One) in the Old Testament. These verses told about the death and Resurrection (return to life) of the Savior, and His offer of forgiveness for all sinners before they occurred. In the New Testament these verses were taught as being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

The New Testament clearly shows how faithful the early believers were in preaching and sharing. Among their important points were Jesus as Lord and Christ, salvation through His righteousness (holy life), the coming kingdom of God, and the promise of eternal life.

Study Acts 6:1–7. Pay attention to verses 4 and 7. What helped the early church to have so much evangelistic success with the religious leaders in Jerusalem?

Many people believed in Jesus and accepted Him as their personal Savior. This is because of the testimonies of believers who shared their own life-changing experiences. It was not simply because people had seen miracles.

The testimonies of and the

6. assurance—a strong belief in God's gift of salvation and eternal life.

witnessing by these first evangelists were powerful. But these people were always dependent upon the Bible. They were using the Bible to interpret (explain) their experiences. How well do you know the Bible? And how can you know it well enough to be able to use it in your own witnessing?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 4

**TELLING OUR STORIES
(Acts 22:2–21)**

The most powerful witnessing a believer can do for Jesus is to share his or her personal testimony. This is the sharing of *what God has done for him or her and how He has affected his or her life and experience*. Usually a personal testimony comes in three separate parts. The first part is a short review of the believer's life before accepting Jesus as personal Savior. The second part tells how the person met the Lord. The third part explains the person's life experience after having known Jesus.

Read through Acts 22:2–21 Paul's defense speech before the Jerusalem council is a personal testimony. Some of the points that he made in each part of his testimony were:

His life before he knew the Lord Jesus (verses 3–5),

How he met the Lord (verses 6–16),

His life since his conversion (verses 17–21).

Even if you were raised in a Christian home and did not experience a powerful conversion experience, you certainly had a special time when you made your personal decision for Jesus Christ. Think back on your experience and try to write out some points that will help to form your own personal testimony. Include the following points.

My life before I knew the Lord Jesus (or before I made a decision for Him),

How I met Jesus (or what influenced my decision for Him),

My life since I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior.

A personal testimony should not be a long story of your whole life. We mentioned earlier that witnessing is a quicker, more informal way of sharing Jesus than evangelism is. As Christians, we should be able to give our testimonies in a short space of time, since we do not know when the opportunity to speak of Jesus may arise. It may be in any number of unplanned places and times. It may be on a plane or at a bus stop. It may be during a short telephone call. No matter how the situation arises, we should be ready and willing to speak about what the Lord has done for us, what reasons we have for our faith, and the hope that God offers to others.

Consider the eternal difference between the lost and the saved, between eternal death and eternal life. In the long run, what else is really important?



We should be ready and willing to speak about what Jesus has done for us at any time.

THURSDAY—APRIL 5

OUR JOB DESCRIPTION (1 Peter 3:15)

Read 1 Peter 3:15. What is this verse teaching us about witnessing? How does it fit in with what we have been studying so far?

By now we have studied evangelism and witnessing enough to know what our “job description” is. We do not need to create a definition of evangelism and witnessing that everyone agrees with. But we must make sure that any description that we accept includes the important parts of sharing the truth about Jesus and what He offers the world.

Consider the description of evangelism that follows: *Evangelism is*

the method of clearly preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ so that people will accept Him as their personal Savior, follow Him as Lord, and become disciples and disciple-makers. Do you think this is a good description? What would you add or take away?

The description of a task (work) is not necessarily a long job description. But it does give some guidance. Of course, when it comes to witnessing, the believer’s individual situation and the believer’s own experience with God will decide how he or she presents the gospel. But an understanding of God’s desire to reach a lost world through His church will make us think about a plan for witnessing and evangelism.

The fast growth of the early church was due to how eager its members were to spread the gospel. This eagerness was based upon their personal experiences with Jesus and the special powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The teachings of Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit remain basic and important to all witnessing and evangelism.

“Thousands of people can be reached in the most simple, humble way. Those who are looked upon as the world’s most gifted and brilliant men and women are often touched by the simple words of one who loves God. He or she is often the one who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things that interest him most deeply. Often, well-prepared words have very little influence. But the true, honest words

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of a son or daughter of God, spoken very simply, have power to open the door to hearts that have long been closed against Christ and His love.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Colporteur⁷ Ministry*, page 39.



True words spoken about Jesus have the power to open hearts.

FRIDAY—APRIL 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Think about your personal testimony and make sure that you are able to give it when the opportunity comes up.

Take some time to sit quietly. Think about what areas of church life you enjoy being involved in. Write them down. You may be interested in evangelistic areas in which your church is not currently involved. List these areas too.

Begin to think about the way you can become involved in an evangelistic ministry in your church. If you are already involved in a ministry and desire to stay there, pray that God will continue to bless that ministry. If you are not involved, pray that God will show you where He wants you to work for Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In the gospel command of Matthew 28:19, 20, there are four action verbs: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. The commands to go, baptize, and teach are important, but the most important command is the command that says, “make disciples.” Discuss what it means to be a disciple and how disciples are made.

❷ Study the quote given below. Then discuss the question: How do we as individuals (persons) and as a church group become a part of God’s way of communicating with a lost world? “As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen. Instead, God chooses human beings. They are men and women who have the same passions as those they are trying to save. Christ took upon Himself human form so that He might reach humans. Jesus as God needed human form, because Christ needed to be both God and human in order to bring salvation to the world. Christ needed to be both God and man so that He as God might have a way of communicating with man.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 296.

❸ Take a look at your own life. What kind of example can you give to the world? How do your words, actions, dress, and attitude influence those around you? In short, what kind of witness do you give to the world, even when you are not actively “witnessing”? In which areas can you improve?

7. colporteur—someone who goes door to door selling religious books.